

Cultural Global Classrooms as a Tool of Acquiring Language Learning Proficiency

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Abstract

This study was conducted to analyze the impact of foreign culture in English learners' students from intermediate level when they interact with students from the same English level from different countries and nationalities through the Global Classroom. Global Classroom is a project conducted by an International University that groups students from different higher educational institutions through video conferences to share experiences, the program is managed in three sessions, session one students talk about college life, session two students talk about family and session three students talk about culture. All of these three video conferencing are guided by the professor to control the development of the conference. At the end of the sessions, the teacher is responsible for wrapping up the sessions and giving the final language feedback using Global Classrooms as a Tool of Acquiring Language Learning Proficiency in the Ecuadorian University Level.

Key Words

Culture, Global Classroom, video conference, tool, proficiency.

Introduction

The Global Classroom program offers students at participants' higher educational institutes the opportunity to learn about different cultures around the world in face-to-face interactions sessions using technological tools and video conference applications. The main objective of this program is to provide periodical meetings where students from all over the world can get together in video conferences and learn from each other experiences about the reality of their countries, families, and culture. These periodic meetings are held at different times during the year between higher level institutions from Mexico, China, Japan, Turkey, Germany, Nigeria, United States, England, and among others. According to class schedules and global time zones, institutions partners get together for approximately three or four weeks during the year.

Participants in Global Classrooms use communication technologies that provide video conferences services to interact with international partners in real time. Pre-prepared topics including themes such as college or university life, family life or issues, cultural traditions and customs, different kind of religions, the meaning or objectives of life, and stereotypes or prejudices of their belonging countries; participants are encouraged to share their points of view and their opinions openly and freely to promote language interactive communication and cross-cultural understanding using a language in common (English). At the end of each session (link), students collaborate with their partner's university students on a project. (e.g., pp presentations, songs, typical

dances, trips, adventures, ways of improving learning languages, and among others) That reflects something they both value about each other's cultural themes. Students also choose a topic they would like to work on, and, with their partner university student, decide freely, the methodology of working together through social network, email, cloud or another tech tool. These projects represent a final research culmination of the session linking experience between participants and professors from both universities.

During these meetings with partnering schools in the Global Understanding Program, students from these institutions encounter not only an authentic language learning but a growth of personal experiences, meet new friends, and contact foreigners and housing possibilities to take advantage of future scholarship programs that they would not otherwise obtain. As a result, English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers can observe the greatest improvement in learners' language acquisition through encounters with Global Classrooms, most likely because of the interactions with native English speakers. Pre-linking preparation is essential for ensuring a successful and effective interaction. Participant preparation can include introductions, common practices of video conferences protocols, and pre-conferencing rehearsals and, as may be necessary for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic encounters, some level of language and cultural training (Comber, Lawson, Gage, Cullum-Hanshaw, & Allen, 2004).

Before students gain access to the communicative tools of the Global Classroom, teachers must train participants on how to

properly use video conferencing, chatting and email, as these technologies require a different set of communicative skills than those found in traditional language classrooms (Hafner, Chik, & Jones, 2013)

An advantage of video conferencing is that it enables participants to utilize paralinguistic and sociolinguistics cues such as facial expressions and gestures to facilitate comprehension. However, since gestures may not be cross-culturally applicable on the other hand, an advantage of chatting is that it can occur outside of the time frames arranged by the participating institutions through resources such as Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, Google, and others (Galloway & Rose, 2015). Similar to face-to-face conversation, chatting occurs in a real-time environment in which users must negotiate meaning by modifying their written output encouraging self-learning and self-study that provides students (Shrum & Glisan).

As English has become the lingua franca around the world (Creoles, 2006), the social and economic reasons for Ecuadorians to learn English has increased substantially. At the same time, the majority of English teachers in Ecuador have neither the language proficiency nor the methodologies to efficiently teach English in the schools. Also, previously, universities were autonomous in their teacher preparation programs. The change was required, and a standard and researched based approach was needed. All the original universities who participated agreed that a common set of standards and a common curriculum were overdue. The level

of English proficiency for participants ranged from beginner to advanced, or from A1 to B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR, (n/d)), this English proficiency is a requirement for graduating students at the University level.

Providing the nonnative participants preparatory language instruction benefitted interaction during the conferencing sessions, ensuring successful cross-cultural communication is not the sole responsibility of nonnative interlocutors. The success of an interaction depends on interlocutors' ability to adapt to immediate communicative demands (Firth, 1996), and in native/nonnative interactions it may frequently be necessary for native speakers to adapt to the communicative situation (Jenkins, 2011). Indeed, the communicative burden must be shared, and native participants must also prepare themselves both linguistically and culturally for the experience.

Culture is closely linked to the learner's feelings and identity. Therefore, the learner's culture could positively impact on his or her learning, being culture one of the most important factors that influences in the motivation of the learner's learning process. Morales explained that learners appreciate and feel motivated when they ask questions about their culture. Students interacting with others and asking and answering questions about culture and interesting situations they feel motivated to talk in a no control context.

The primary concern of sociolinguistic is to study correlations between language use and social structure, in the way that

students use the language in real situations, students create the correct environment to interaction (Coulmas, 1998).

Theoretical background and Practical observation methodologies were applied to develop this current research, firstable theoretical background of concepts investigated in books, research journals, information given in sociolinguistics classes and others; then to interact practically with Global Classroom, the use of technology through videoconferences apps, social networks, links and others; offer the opportunity for students to connect with students worldwide and live the experience to create an environment of language learning interaction.

Teachers apply observation during all the process to understand the learning process that occurs in class; later they will assess the language learning understanding of the students and their acquisition improvement trough formal and informal evaluations, however, teachers will measure students' perceptions about their experience in class trough prepared open and close questions that can provide feedback from the results of the program and teachers can understand from the context the level of motivation and the level of improvement in students' English language acquisition.

Students involved in this process belong from the English Language School, in this case the best improvement that teachers will observe could be the students' progress in their level of communication in their English classes; despite the fact of being an English student, learners will improve their level of

knowledge in cultural, religious, environmental, and family topics.

The companion of these sessions created for English students' interaction were fascinating to understand the culture of every country that they link or connect with, moreover, students were able to use a language in common which is English to ask and respond questions as well as interested in expressing themselves fluently about their culture in English.

Also, these interactions provided to the EFL teachers in Ecuador an opportunity to use the English native speaking participants at Global Classrooms as language models to demonstrate that students' can be fluent in the language not only traveling to a Native Speaker country but creating the atmosphere to interact with other cultures through videoconferences.

Positive results were obtained in students' language acquisition, observation and formal assessment inside the class in the pre, while and post activities sessions link with the partner institutions.

The influence of the culture in the interaction, worldwide interaction occurs during sessions, students can learn through video conference so they can analyze, enjoy, play, learn, and practice their use of language, in an interactive way.

Culture affects positively the learning process in an EFL class, when you teach another language you are teaching culture at the same time, despite the interference of the different cultural backgrounds, when students connect to other students the common language of communication is English.

Sociocultural interaction benefits students to improve their level of proficiency, integrating tools for video conferencing in the learning language process increase students' confidence to communicate and most of all increase students' motivation.

In conclusion, Global Classrooms could be a good example of a tool to be applied inside of the English curriculum because benefits language acquisition, students will be able to demonstrate their learning in class, grammar structures, vocabulary, use of language, and other linguistic components in a real context.

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